DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 408 281 SP 037 377

AUTHOR Freidus, Helen
TITLE Reflection in Teaching: Development Plus.
PUB DATE Mar 97
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Elementary Secondary Education; Graduate Students; Group Discussion; Higher Education; *Portfolio Assessment; Portfolios (Background Materials); Preservice Teacher Education; *Reflective Teaching; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Student Development
IDENTIFIERS *Bank Street College of Education NY

ABSTRACT

Case study methodology is used to explore the progress of one cohort of graduate students at Bank Street College of Education (New York). The portfolio process requires students to: (1) identify and discuss the artifacts that they find most significant in their personal and professional development; (2) identify connections between and among artifacts; (3) reflect upon these connections in order to identify a unifying theme; (4) examine artifacts and theme for both personal and theoretical perspectives; and (5) participate in public presentations of the portfolio. Data for the study were gathered from a subgroup of five 1996-97 portfolio candidates, all of whom had completed their supervised field work and were working full or part time in school, day care, or community service settings. As students reflected on the process, several themes emerged. The first was trust: trust in self, trust in other, and trust in the process. Only when they began to feel safe, were students willing to take risks. A second theme was synergy. As students began to bond with one another, a palpable energy developed; this energy provided support for the effort of each individual. A third theme was the development of an understanding of the process. Findings suggest that reflective practice develops in the context of conversations occurring in an environment of trust. (Contains 17 references.) (ND)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 408 281

Reflection In Teaching: Development Plus

by

Helen Freidus
Bank Street College of Education
New York, New York

The Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
Chicago, IL
March, 1997

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

H. Freidus

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SP037377

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Reflection in Teaching: Development Plus

by
Helen Freidus, Ed.D.
Bank Street College of Education

In the world of literacy education which is the home base of my current work, a long-standing debate exists. Some teachers and researchers believe that reading and writing are emergent processes; children will naturally develop necessary competencies when they are provided with an environment that is supportive and print rich, an environment that offers a great deal of modeling and a wide array of materials that are relevant to their experiences and interests (Goodman, 1968). Others believe that reading and writing are processes that must be directly taught. Children, if they are to become competent readers and writers, must be provided with carefully organized, systematic forms of instruction that are hierarchically ordered (Chall, 1967; Adams, 1990) . Yet another group believes that successful literacy instruction must combine a supportive, meaning rich context with explicit teaching of strategies and skills provided as needed to individuals and groups (Holdaway, 1979; Calkins, 1986; Clay, 1988). It is with the third group that my belief system is most consonant. And, it seems to me, there are some analogies that can be drawn between the world of literacy instruction and that of reflective teaching.

Reflective teaching is a complex process. It is, in part, developmental. It flourishes in supportive contexts that provide opportunities for students to engage in dialogue in which they explore and examine their belief systems, their teaching practices, and the relationship between the two (Schon, 1983; Lyons, 1996; LaBoskey, 1994). However, there are some behaviors inherent in reflective teaching that appear to be observable and teachable. These constitute habits of mind that may be explicitly

taught or at least coached, not in a pre-ordained hierarchical fashion, but as needed, within a meaningful context.

This paper will use case study methodology to explore the progress of one cohort of graduate students at Bank Street College of Education as they engage in the process of portfolio construction. It will describe conversations with mentors and peers that take place within the formal structures of the portfolio system, and the ways in which explicit instruction has, on occasion, been woven into these conversations to address identified needs. In so doing, it will document the ways in which a holistic approach to the portfolio process facilitates the ways in which teachers and teacher educators: 1. become more comfortable and articulate in talking about professional beliefs and values 2. become comfortable with the risk involved in examining tacitly held beliefs and values 3. look critically at the implications of their beliefs and values for classroom teaching 4. share their stories and, in so doing, create caring communities that scaffold both their own learning and that of their colleagues.

Setting the Context

Bank Street is a small, unaffiliated graduate school of education. Philosophically, it is grounded in a perspective of developmental-interaction (Shapiro & Biber, 1972). This perspective is characterized by a belief in the dynamic process of teaching and learning, a valuing of both autonomy and community as the outcomes of the educational process, and a vision of education as an instrument for social change and, thus, a profoundly social and political process. Bank Street sees itself as a learner - centered institution, placing great import on the voices of both children and teachers and the communities which shape and are shaped by these voices (Antler, 1987). Within this context, portfolios are seen as a pedagogical tool through which faculty and students with very different backgrounds, disciplines, and learning and teaching styles may engage together in a process of mutual learning.

Dewey writes:

> As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations that follow. (Dewey, 1938, p.44)

He goes on to say that it is through the process of reflecting on one's experience and knowledge that new knowledge is developed. Portfolios are structured to provide opportunities for students to examine newly acquired professional knowledge within the context of their own beliefs and prior experience, to create linkages between new and old ideas and practices, and to share their reflections on these linkages with their colleagues in the hope that the dialogue thus created will broaden the understanding of all involved.

Portfolios at Bank Street are not required for all students. They serve as one option for the culminating project required for graduation; students may choose to engage in the portfolio process, construct in an independent study, or write a directed essay. Thus, portfolio attracts a student cohort that is aware of and willing to engage in a process that is designed to be open-ended and reflective. Similarly, faculty members who choose to mentor the portfolio candidates do so on a voluntary basis. Although the time commitment is extensive, over seventy per cent of mentors have chosen to participate in the process for three or more years.

The Portfolio Requirements

The Portfolio Process requires students: 1) to identify and discuss the artifacts that they find most significant in their personal and professional development, 2) to identify connections between and among artifacts and 3) to reflect upon these connections in order to identify a unifying theme, 4) to examine artifacts and theme from both personal and theoretical perspectives, and 5) to participate in public presentations of the Portfolio. This process was designed to identify and strengthen the

bridges connecting personal knowledge, academic knowledge, and knowledge of the field.

The completed portfolio includes:

- Artifacts - Six artifacts documenting understanding of or competency in four domains[1] of teacher education. Artifacts may be represented through diverse media including but not limited to audio-tapes, video tapes, picture collages, charts, graphs, and a variety of writing genres.
- Captions - A one to two page caption accompanies each artifact. Captions provide a reflective rationale for the inclusion of the artifact in the portfolio and relate the artifact to an emergent theme which connects the artifacts. Captions must provide clear responses to the following questions:
    1. What have I learned from the experience represented by each artifact?
    2. How has this learning shaped or been shaped by my educational vision and the theory I have studied?
    3. What implications has this experience had for my work with children?
- Framing Statements - An introduction of three to five pages articulates the theme and relates it to the individual's philosophy of teaching. A concluding statement, also three to five pages, synthesizes the work included in the portfolio and, with references to relevant theory, discusses the educational implications of the theme and the student's personal journey. Portfolios are expected to conclude not with answers but with questions that have been

---

[1] Domains refer to disciplines or perspectives. The domains that must be clearly represented by artifacts include human development, educational history and philosophy, the social context of teaching, and curriculum.

raised through the professional journey and the process of portfolio construction.

The portfolio requirements define what is to be addressed. How these requirements are to be addressed - what is to be included and how it is to be represented - is open-ended and differs from portfolio to portfolio.

The Cohort

The data collected for this study has been gathered from a subgroup of five 1996-97 portfolio candidates. They include 3 women and 2 men, ranging in age from 26 to 42. All completed their supervised field work during the 1995-96 academic year and are currently working full or part time in school, day care, or community service settings. Each member of the cohort has a faculty mentor with whom he or she meets once or twice a month. In addition, portfolio candidates and mentors meet together in monthly study groups in which they discuss the progress of their work and reflect upon issues related to the process. Data for the study has been gathered from audio-tapes and transcriptions of peer group meetings, individual interviews, mentor field notes, and the captions written by group members.

The Development of the Study Group

The evolution of the study group provides important insight into the complexity of the portfolio process. As reported in prior work (Freidus, 1996), the study group was not a part of the initial structure of portfolio at Bank Street. Students were assigned faculty mentors with whom they would work on an individual basis. It was believed that peer support groups would informally develop among candidates on an ad hoc basis.

At the debriefing session following the final presentation of the first year's portfolios, students spoke of the informal peer relationships many of them had developed and the ways in which they had mentored each other. They suggested that forums for peer sharing be built systematically into the portfolio process. The

suggestion was enacted the following year. Monthly meetings in which faculty and students might elect to share their work were scheduled. Student attendance was dismal. Yet, at that year's debriefing session, a similar request was made. When faculty pointed out that meetings had been scheduled but few had come. Students responded: "We wish we had." With these responses in mind, a decision was made to require the meetings for the next cohort. If the sessions proved fruitful, they would become a formal part of the requirements. If not, there would be no more attention paid to the call for institutionalized forums for peer dialogue. During this year of required sessions, attendance was excellent; dialogue was rich. Students valued faculty input but, as their predecessors had suggested, appeared to gain special strength from the feedback of their peers. These structures have been in place for the last three years.

Over time, students have repeatedly spoken of the pressure involved in completing the portfolio in the December to May time period allotted for the cohort. With this feedback in mind, the application date for this year's cohort was moved from September to May with individual and group meetings beginning in October rather than in December. As past students predicted, the pace has proven to be less pressured. What is particularly interesting is that three of the five sub-groups have chosen spontaneously to add additional informal meetings to those meetings formally scheduled. These sessions have been well attended and deemed extremely worth while. The process suggests that both time and institutional models play important roles in generating a collaborative process.

Progress of the Group

The first meeting of the small group provided an opportunity for sharing expectations, voicing anxieties, setting common goals. From a faculty perspective , it was an opportunity to articulate the goal that the group would develop into a set of "critical friends" who reflected on their own work and that of their peers. As members described their artifacts and presented their captions, they would serve as resources for

each other. The purpose of the group was to provide a forum in which to voice problems, raise questions, refine and extend work on portfolio components, and celebrate the accomplishments of self and other. Hopefully, the group would serve as a safe haven in which one might say "I don't understand" when the structure of an artifact or a caption or the thought behind it was not clear. For students the session served as an opportunity to identify procedures that would be helpful in sharing work. It was decided that captions were to be prepared and distributed a week in advance so that members might come prepared to share their thoughts on their own work and that of their colleagues.

The routines were readily established; the anxiety, however, did not abate. The meaning of an artifact was clear, but "just what is a caption?" was repeatedly asked. The description provided above, taken from the handbook, did not suffice. "What does it mean to write a reflective rationale?" the students asked. The focusing questions printed in the Handbook for the Culminating Project (see pg. 4 of this paper) were distributed and discussed. Students appeared to understand and the session ended with the kinds of good feelings mediated by anxiety that often accompany the onset of open-ended work.

Early captions prepared for the second and third session were filled with the right terminology: "I feel; I remember; I wonder" , but the level of reflection hovered on the surface. An example from one student read: "Revisiting my past (through the experience of writing a children's story for a class on language and literacy) led me to think about the influence of the family experiences of my students on their classroom behavior. ... The action of writing stories was positive for me. ...I believe it can be helpful for children as well" (Don, 1996). A great beginning, but there it ended. How, why, connections to theory or to actual experiences in the field were almost never explored.

Group dynamics were equally problematic. Members were supportive of one another but in a global way. They did not seem to be willing to probe each other's thoughts, to ask for clarity, or to acknowledge that their colleagues' reports might be missing important pieces of information. Instead they assumed that the meaning they constructed from the captions was based on actual information included in the written caption rather than on their own inferences and assumptions. For example, a student commented, "I liked the way you connected your own experience to that of the children." when there was no evidence in the caption that this had been done. Critique was left to the faculty mentors; students were cheerleaders for each other. Comments that were made were single statements, offerings from listener to presenter; there was little if any actual dialogue involved.

Mentors conferred about how to proceed; it seemed as if some kind of intervention was necessary. Not one or two students in the group but everyone seemed to be floundering. The decision was made to deviate from the usual procedures and address the problem directly. The questions, from the handbook, designed to drive the captions were modified, reformatted, and distributed to use as a worksheet. These questions:

1. What did I learn from the experience represented by this artifact?
2. What are the implications of this learning for my work with children?
3. How has this learning shaped or been shaped by my educational vision and/or values?
4. How does the learning connect with the theory I have studied?

would form the basis for the evening's work. Students were asked to exchange captions with one of their colleagues, to read their colleague's caption, and, fill in the answers to the worksheet questions when they found relevant information in the caption they were reading. An opportunity would then be provided to conference with one's partner and

with the whole group. As students engaged in the process, the level of awareness and metacognition increased measurably. As students looked at each other's work in a structured fashion, they began to reflect on their own work as well. The tone of the session was overwhelmingly supportive, but it was indisputably a work session.

At the close of the session, mentors asked students if the experience had been helpful. All agreed that it had; the feedback they had received on their own work was very useful; they now had a much clearer vision of what a caption should be. Then Elena said:

> I wonder if we lost some of the spontaneity. I found it very helpful tonight, but I wonder if we lost some of the flow of ideas.

Mentors acknowledged this and responded that it was up to the group whether the procedure should be used in subsequent meetings. To which Kayla replied:

> What if we each use these sheets as we are reading the captions before we come into group? Then we would be looking at each other's work with a framework. We'd jot down notes and be more ready to talk.

The decision was to proceed in this way.

By the fifth session, the dynamics of the group were significantly different. Students were clearly engaged in their own process and that of their peers. Meaningful critique seemed to emerge from an honest desire to know and to engage in dialogue around a shared journey. Kayla's comment: "When I read this, I wanted to know more about what you were thinking. What do you do now when you don't have your supervisor or your cooperating teacher sitting in the back of the room to tell you when you're off the track?" acknowledged that Don had omitted some important details. The warm, caring tone of her voice made it clear that she was, indeed, responding as a critical friend pushing him to tell more, to look more deeply, because she valued what he had to say.

Moreover, students were beginning to engage in reflection about their own work and the insights the portfolio process was helping them to discover. A truly "aha" experience was described by Elena:

> Carol and Perry, your captions helped me figure out something important. I have always had problems with theory. Listening to you, I realize that I had this idea of theory as authority. And I have been looking to work from theory. Each of you points out so clearly that there is another way to look at theory. Carol, you say, " Freire helped me articulate what I had so much difficulty explaining." Perry, you say, " I discovered a theoretical foundation that clarified what I felt intuitively about children." I realized that I approach theory that way also. I have all of this experience and then I read things that pull it together for me. Then I can work from there. But there aren't a whole lot of times when I say, "Oh. I believe this and now I am going to do it." That's how I always thought theory should work.
>
> So I'm going back now and reworking each of my captions to show how coming to understand theory has almost been an additional process for me within this portfolio process. The first versions precede my interactions with theory because I saw myself as having no theory at the time. It's been a series of aha's and articulations, and an addition of vocabulary and all of that. Like you, Perry, I had a powerful time with Experience and Education, because it either confirmed so much that I thought and experienced or it told me that I had to rethink things. Your two captions helped me to see that.

The voices of faculty mentors voices were noticeable throughout this session. However, there was a difference in the role they played. They became one among many engaged in dialogue; no longer were they the only ones who questioned. The difference was noticeable to everyone.

> Velma: It really struck me as I sat here that Helen and I said very little tonight. You all were really helpful to each other in real and pointed ways. You really were critical friends.
>
> Helen: You were so supportive of each other. Not that you weren't supportive in the very first session, but there seems to be a qualitative difference to that support.
>
> Elena: Just for myself, I've been reading the last two captions on a much deeper level. I've been getting more out of each of your work, and I've had more to say.

Helen: Why, do you think this has happened?

As students began to reflect on the process over time, several themes emerged. The first was trust - trust in self, trust in other, trust in the process. Only when they began to feel safe, were students willing to take risks. Moreover, they saw risk-taking not only in relation to exposing themselves, their ideas, and experiences, but also in relation to asking about the work of others. To provide critique of a colleague's work or ask for clarification, was more difficult than faculty mentors had anticipated.

> Perry (to Don): I actually like that connection you made between your observations of kids and what you planned to do with them. Your ideas are really interesting. I'd like to see the writing tightened up a bit though.
>
> Carol: Can you give some suggestions about what you mean by that. I ask not to put you on the spot. But this has been a problem of mine, and I'm still working on it. I know it was very frustrating to me when someone would say to me: "Clean this up." or " Tighten it up." and I had no idea how to do that. I don't know if you (turning to Don) are in the same place. But *I am taking a risk in asking you this,* Perry, because it was only when my husband began to say: "Do this. Clean up this particular sentence." When he got that concrete with me, it began to make a difference in my writing. Before that, I was just too overwhelmed. I wouldn't know where to begin."

There is a great deal written in the literature about the risk involved in sharing one's own ideas and practices. Far less common is mention of risk in relation to suggestions to others.

A second theme, related to trust, is the synergy of the group. As students began to bond with one another, a palpable energy developed; this energy provided support for the efforts of each individual. The students described the experience in several ways.

> Carol: I think it's a bit like Big Book learning[2]. The energy feeds the process. When you read a Big Book, everyone chimes in. Some people are kind of behind, but they see the model of everyone else reading

---

[2] For a description of the uses of Big Books in literacy education, see Holdaway, 1979; Routmann, 1988, 92.

> along, so they chime in too. We all have our strengths, but where I might be weak, you might be strong and where I might be strong, you might be weak. There is a kind of critical mass in the group that helps everyone along.
>
> Elena: Reading each other's captions and seeing the different ways in which we were all engaged in the same process really helped me. As I began to write my caption, I laid out other peoples'; I could see the connections between them. I felt that my own work was accelerated by this kind of immersion in the group's work.

As with children, interactions with peers appear to play a significant role in motivating and shaping growth and development in adults.

The third theme that stands out is the importance of understanding the process. Students come to the portfolio toward the close of their graduate program. Most have been working intensely throughout their courses of study to develop a persona of teacher as facilitator of learning; to do this they must leave behind the role of teacher as disseminator of information to which they have long been socialized and become reflective practitioners. For many, there is still discomfort with, as well as confusion about, the real meaning of their newly developing role. Now, they come to portfolio. They have done their best to inform themselves before selecting the option. They have read available descriptive material, attended information sessions, talked to the prior year's portfolio candidates. They think they understand; they have chosen portfolio because they value the opportunity it will afford them to reflect on their experience. Then, it becomes time to start their own portfolios and what seemed to make perfect sense suddenly becomes quite elusive. How much of self should be in the captions? As a student from a prior cohort remarked:

> The difficulty is not in the reflecting itself, but in incorporating reflection into a professional project. I have always been trained to keep myself out of research or professional writing. Out in the world we are told that projects that involve the self are softer, less rigorous. ... This is a very hard process for linear people. I wanted a right and wrong. (Alice, 6/96)

In many portfolio groups, a natural leader has emerged within the group; his or her strength in reflecting on practice has scaffolded the reflective process for others. In other groups, students immediately develop the kind of synergy that, with some prompts from faculty mentors, enable them to shift into the reflective mode necessary for meaningful engagement in portfolio process. However, there are groups like the cohort involved in this study where, despite the best efforts of their individual mentors, most if not all students appear to be painfully floundering for a protracted period of time. In such situations, the use of explicit teaching interventions like the directed worksheet described above seem to be a valuable tool for helping students to become more reflective. Comments, like Perry's, in which he describes the way in which his work evolved when he began to pay attention to the focusing questions document this.

> In my earlier captions, I thought I had to be much more descriptive and recount the history of the artifact. In this one, I'm trying to be much more reflective and to address the questions on the outline. I thought about what was going on when I wrote that paper on Experience and Education, and how much the paper meant to me.

Students agreed, that while they preferred the flow of conversation, that predominated in the sessions before and after the workshop session, the skills they developed in that period enabled them to engage more productively in the process. Developing an understanding of the process was the foundation they found necessary for reflection and dialogue.

Conclusion

The data from this study points out the complex factors contributing to the development of reflective practice. It suggests that reflective practice develops within the context of conversations occurring within an environment of trust. It supports the notion that adult learning, like that of children, is a process of unfolding and demonstrates that the unfolding is stimulated and supported by social interaction. However, the data also suggests that there are times when a supportive social context is

not enough. When students do not understand what it means to engage in reflection on practice or how to integrate personal funds of knowledge with academic and professional experience, some form of explicit teaching may facilitate the process.

References:

Adams, M.J. (1990). Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

Antler, J. (1987). Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The making of a modern woman. New Haven: Yale University Press

Calkins, L. (1986). The art of teaching writing. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Chall, J. (1983). Learning to read: The great debate. NY: McGraw Hill

Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, M. (1995) Teachers professional knowledge landscapes. New York: Teachers College Press

Clay, M. (1988) The early detection of reading problems, 4th ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Dewey, John. (1938). Experience and education. NY: Collier Books

Goodman, K. (1968). The psycholinguistic nature of the reading process. Detroit: Wayne State University Press

Freidus, H. (April, 1996). Reflection in teaching: Can it be taught?, A paper presented at the 1996 meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New York

Freire, P. (1976,84). Pedagogy of the oppressed. NY: Continuum Press

Holdaway, D. (1979). The foundations of literacy. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

La Boskey, V. (J1994). Development of reflective practice. NY: Teachers College Press

Lyons, N. (April, 1996). Reflection in teaching: The meaning teachers make. A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. New York City.

Routman, R. (1988). Transitions. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Routman, R. (1992). Invitations. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Schon, D. (1983). The reflective practitioner. NY: Basic Books

Shapiro, E. & Biber, B. (1972, Sept.). The education of young children: A developmental - interaction approach. Teachers College Record. 74(1), 55-79